IN THIS ISSUE

A MESSAGE FROM DEB FOXCROFT 1

Centre Lays Foundations and Takes Down Walls 2

Busted for Good Behaviour 3

Good to Better to Best Practices 3

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE? 3

The Youth Perspective 4

CALENDAR OF EVENTS 4

Busted for Good Behaviour cont'd 5

In Brief 5

SIGN ME UP 5

A Message from Deb Foxcroft

ADM, Aboriginal Regional Support Services

I am very pleased to introduce this issue of Family Matters. I would like to update you on the progress being made with respect to services for Aboriginal children, youth and families in our province.

Earlier this year, the ministry began a special recruitment campaign for Aboriginal Mental Health Services. This campaign will provide more service to Aboriginal communities and areas with large Aboriginal populations over the next several years. We will also be designing and implementing Aboriginal CYMH services that are relevant to Aboriginal people, respecting Aboriginal traditions and way of life. A special collaboration with the University of Northern BC now provides culturally-relevant child welfare training to Aboriginal social workers who will go on to work throughout the region.

Deb Foxcroft, ADM, Aboriginal Regional Support Services

The North recently witnessed the signing of an historic guardianship agreement between MCFD and the Gitxsan Chid and Family Services Society (GCFSS). After more than 30 years of negotiations, Gitxsan children that have been in the care of the ministry though continuing custody orders will now be under the guardianship of the Gitxsan. This legal transfer of guardianship begins with six Gitxsan children in Hazelton and continues with 14 children from Terrace. The corresponding funding will also be shifted from MCFD to GCFSS.

Transferring decision-making to our Aboriginal communities is essential to the transformation of services for Aboriginal children, youth and families, and I am happy to report that we are making significant progress in the development of the interim Aboriginal Authorities. In June, the Vancouver Island Aboriginal Transition Team (VIATT) celebrated its establishment as an official Interim Aboriginal Planning Authority. These authorities will ultimately guide the design and development of culturally appropriate, community-governed services for Aboriginal children in the province.

We have worked very hard over the last year with much to celebrate. As we make this journey together it is important to give ourselves an opportunity to reflect on what we have achieved so far. National Aboriginal Day this year gave us a chance to not only honour and share our diverse Aboriginal cultures, but also to celebrate what we have achieved and our commitment to accomplishing more in the future.

When I began my role as ADM, I promised to bring the voice of Aboriginal people to MCFD, to share ideas on the approaches that will create real change. Thanks to committed ministry staff, service providers, and Aboriginal community members and leadership, we have been able to take important steps towards our new vision for strong and healthy Aboriginal children, youth and families in BC. Klecho! Klecho! (Thank you)

BRITISH COLUMBIA
The Best Place on Earth

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Centre Lays Foundations and Takes Down Walls

Val London, Community Services Manager, Abbotsford and Karen McLean, Executive Director, Fraser Valley Child Development Centre.

In Abbotsford, four major organizations are teaming up to provide better access to resources, promote collaboration and support new research.

The Centre for Child and Family Development (the Centre) is a unique partnership between the Ministry of Children and Family Development (MCFD), the Fraser Valley Child Development Centre (FVCDC), the University College of the Fraser Valley (UCFV) and Fraser Health. Its purpose is to encourage communication and collaboration between UCFV and the many organizations and resources dedicated to child and family development within the Fraser Valley.

One of their primary goals is to provide a forum where community members can share their program needs, research questions, educational initiatives and professional development proposals.

"It's a place to talk about how the larger system can be mobilized to achieve something better for kids," says Karen McLean, Executive Director for the FVCDC. "We are trying to make this larger system more responsive and more synergistic. People come to us with an idea or a question and the Centre looks for a way to help."

Through the Centre's planned data bank, organizations and individuals will have access to information about the human and material resources available from the Centre members and other community groups.

The Centre's partnership also helps to break down barriers around cost-sharing and responsibility. "We have a lot of client crossover. By removing bureaucratic barriers between agencies, ministries and other community groups, we can pool our knowledge and enhance our ability to create better services for kids," says Val London, MCFD Community Services Manager in Abbotsford.

Supporting new research initiatives is also a huge part of the Centre's mandate. "What sets this project apart from other collaborations I've been involved in is our focus on applied research," says Val. "By spurring the development of new knowledge which pertains directly to services for children and families, we can support and inform program planning at many different levels."

A natural benefit of this collaborative research is the ongoing exchange of information across sectors. Ministry staff, service providers, university faculty and students as well as community members like child care and after school care workers have more opportunities to learn from each other and share their practical expertise. "Not only are we increasing our own knowledge, but we're also aiming to raise the level of skill among many others who work with children, which ultimately leads to a more competent, inclusive community environment," says Karen.

The Centre is still in the early stages, but the partners are already talking about creating a physical location at the Abbotsford UCFV campus. They're also on their way to creating a virtual centre which Karen believes will bring previously unconnected people together and "act as a catalyst for other ideas out there."

The Centre is a prime example of changing how organizations operate. Les Boon, Regional Executive Director for the Fraser area says, "Staff and service providers are stretching beyond their usual mandate and boundaries. Children blend into all systems and this project is, above all, about doing what makes sense for them."

Val hopes partnerships like the Centre will change the system for future generations. "This project succeeded because of the willingness of all parties to be involved and the solid, trusting relationships that were already in place. I envision a time when the infrastructure itself encourages, even expects, this kind of collaboration, and what we are doing becomes a regular part of doing business."

For more information on The Centre for Child Development, please contact or Karen McLean at mclean@fvcdc.org.

FAMILY MATTERS
YOUR CONNECTION TO THE MINISTRY OF CHILDREN & FAMILY DEVELOPMENT & OUR SERVICE PROVIDERS
BRITISH COLUMBIA
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Busted for Good Behaviour

Imagine you're a teenager and you're hanging out at the skate park with your friends, relaxing and having fun. Suddenly a police officer appears and hands you a ticket – for being good!

On April 30th 2007, the Vernon Integrated Youth Services Office, along with North Okanagan Youth & Family Services Society (NOYFSS) and the Vernon RCMP launched a new program to reinforce positive youth behaviour in their community.

Ticketing it Right is the brain-child of MCFD Probation Officer Mechelle Hennig and NOYFSS member Dean Francks. The two attended a provincial Youth Justice forum where they learned about a Lower Mainland police program which rewards positive youth behaviour with passes to local recreation activities. Mechelle and Dean became excited to pitch the idea in their own community.

Developing the program and securing funding was ongoing for over a year. "It was a lot of legwork in the community," says Mechelle, "But everyone was very enthusiastic, especially the Vernon police who jumped right on board."

...continued on page 5

Good to Better to Best Practices

Good practice development is key to MCFD's ongoing transformation process. But how exactly is the ministry working to identify, reinforce and build upon strengths-based programs for its clients? One answer is the What's Working for Children and Youth in BC project.

This project committee includes Elders, Youth and Aboriginal representatives, as well as ministry staff and contracted experts and is led by Philip Cook, a consultant with MCFD and founder and current executive director of the International Institute for Child Rights and Development at the University of Victoria. Philip has worked with UN agencies, governments, and non-governmental organizations, as well as with children, youth and families on international research initiatives, projects and policy work aimed at supporting vulnerable children and youth.

Assistant deputy minister Deb Foxcroft is taking the lead in reviewing Aboriginal 'good practice' programs, and Special Advisor Stan Williams is helping to share the expertise of the Youth Advisory Council (YAC) throughout the process.

The committee has been making regional presentations and conducting interviews with ministry staff, parents, youth, elders and community stakeholders from across BC. The purpose of these interviews is to identify programs and initiatives (including formal programs run by government or non-government organizations, as well as informal activities at the community level such as cultural activities and youth groups) that are making a significant contribution to the lives of vulnerable children and youth in BC.
The interviews are being guided by five themes as identified by the ministry's Provincial Reference Group. These themes are: child-centred, family- and community-based, systems change, cultural touchstones and sound process. By identifying programs and actions which reflect these themes, the ministry hopes to learn more about the thinking behind good programming, and in turn reinforce these values and principles in its practice.

Based on the interview results, a number of 'good practices' will be selected from various regions for further analysis through in-depth staff and stakeholder interviews, surveys, focus groups, exit interviews with youth in care, community consultations and discussions with Elders. In this way, MCFD will increase its knowledge of aspects of programming which support children's holistic (physical, social and emotional) development.

In order to showcase these good practices and to raise awareness of the current strengths and challenges regarding supports for children, youth and families in BC, two reports are also being compiled: What's Working for Children and Youth in BC and What's Working for Aboriginal Children and Youth. The reports will be shared with staff, stakeholders and the public in the early fall and a What's Working conference is scheduled for late 2007.

For more information on What's Working, email: pcook@uvic.ca.

DO YOU HAVE A STORY TO SHARE?

Are you a staff member or service provider involved in delivering an innovative program or service? Do you know someone who deserves to be recognized?

Click on the link below to send us your idea in 100 words or less and your suggestion may be featured in a future article. MCF.NewsletterFeedback@gov.bc.ca

The Youth Perspective

Ryan Thirlwall is a 19-year-old youth activist from Victoria and a member of the MCFD Youth Advisory Council. Ryan has been involved in many volunteer activities including: dancing with special needs adults, fundraising for Hurricane Katrina relief, packing food for the Good Food Box Program, and handing out clothes to homeless youth. He is also a board member of the Community Youth Development Coalition of BC.

Youth in Motion has named Ryan one of the Top 20 Under 20 for 2007, in honour of the significant level of achievement, innovation and leadership he has demonstrated, all before the age of 20.

Recently, Ryan took the time to share his thoughts around speaking out on youth issues, the importance of mentoring and the real rewards of activism.

I want to start my work here in Victoria. One project I'd like to work on is developing a group called a Speakers' Bureau. Youth would speak to five main issues: youth justice, mental health, suicide, sexually-exploited youth and racism.

I'd like to mentor these youth, listen to them and develop them so we can do a roadshow and travel up the island to different schools. I want to make it fun, like put some theatre work into it. I want to help expand people's talents; that's a big part of meaningful youth engagement to me.

To make a real difference you have to find those youth who've been through their own life struggles and get them to collaborate with you. Youth with experience are the ones people are going to look at and say: "You know what? They know. They've been there."

I think that's why I've been able to make such a huge impact. My life hasn't been a walk in the park. I've been in the youth justice system. I've been involved in a youth agreement with the ministry. I've been in foster care. I've been out on the streets. I've had drug addictions. I've lost loved

Ryan Thirlwall, Youth Advisory Council member.

ones. I've seen a lot and I've lived a lot myself. Never in my wildest dreams did I see myself taking on the responsibilities I have now, which is why I like to mentor the underdogs.

If I can mentor these kids in the same way people mentored me my whole life, speaking positive and letting them believe in themselves, it'll make a difference. I always tell other youth, if I can do it, you can do it and probably ten times better than me. Don't set yourself boundaries; step outside the box and look in.

Mentorship isn't telling someone what to do but guiding them in achieving their goals. There's no reason why anyone should say: "You're just a kid. You can't do it." If you show us we can learn. Guidance is the key. Youth will listen more to other youth, but in some cases they want that reassurance from adults. And if you have the proper adult mentoring and guiding you then it's a win-win situation.

It's also about motivating youth to make positive changes within themselves first. You can't help anyone until you help yourself first.

I see my job as being something that someone needs to stand up and do. I care about what's going on in my city, province, country and world and I need to do it. I want to have a youth-led revolution where youth stand up and speak for their rights.

It's great to win awards but what means more to me is working hard and seeing results, positive results. That's an award all on its own. That's the payoff. I don't want people to look at me and think: "Oh he sits on the board of just another organization." I want people to say: "This is the work that Ryan does and it's meaningful."

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

August 20-24: POPARD's Autism Spectrum Disorder Course, Vancouver, BC

September 8: International Literacy Day

September 27: An Introduction to Autism Treatment - A Case Management Survival Guide for Parents & Community Professionals, Prince George, BC

October: International Walk to School Month

October 12-13: 2007 BC Neonatal Conference, Burnaby, BC

October 15-20: IDP/AIDP/SCDP/ASCDP Fall Inservice, Vancouver, BC

Busted for Good Behaviour cont'd...

Over the next year, tickets will be handed out to young residents who are caught doing something "right." Dean explains: "It's about acting in a positive way, being respectful to the people and property around you. It can be something as simple as wearing a bike helmet, or helping someone across the street."

The majority of tickets will be given out by the Vernon RCMP. Youth can also receive tickets from MCFD staff, service providers like NOYFSS, and Interior Health street addiction workers. Tickets will also be distributed in the outlying rural communities of Lumby, Armstrong and Enderby.

Each ticket offers free passes to the movies, a Vernon Vipers hockey game, swimming, billiards and workouts at a local gym. "We wanted the activities to be youth-focused," says Mechelle. "These are things that all kids can enjoy but can't always afford."

Thanks to one-time-only funding from MCFD and very generous donations from Vernon businesses, there are 1200 tickets available for this fiscal year. Each ticket is worth an impressive $60 dollars in pro-social activities -- a grand total of $72,000 in community activities for youth!

It's a small price to pay for the considerable benefits of the program. Not only will it improve the profile of youth with local businesses, but Ticketing it Right also hopes to target youth who are at risk of becoming entrenched in a street lifestyle. "We want to encourage these young people to take part in more constructive recreational activities," says Mechelle.

Moreover, the program will build and improve rapport between youth, Vernon police and community workers.

Doug Hughes, Regional Executive Director for the Interior, enthuses: "Ticketing it Right models positive reinforcement by showing young people that they're valued and respected. It's no longer about telling them they're doing something wrong --it's about rewarding them for doing something right."

SIGN ME UP

Please add me to your electronic distribution list.

In Brief

Graduation Time at UNBC

On May 25, 2007, UNBC graduated its first group of Aboriginal Child Protection workers trained in the North for the North.

The Aboriginal Child Protection Recruitment Project is a partnership between MCFD, northern delegated agencies represented by Carrier Sekani Family Services and UNBC. It is intended to train social workers to provide safe care for Aboriginal children and youth within a culturally-appropriate context.

Graduates of the program now hold a certificate in child welfare specialization in addition to their social work degrees. They now move on to work in a ministry or delegated agency office in communities like Prince George, Quesnel, Fort St. John, Smithers and Terrace.

Congratulations to these ten graduates!

MCFD Continues Transfer of First Nations Files

In our March 2006 issue we brought you the story of Ktunaxa Kinbasket Child and Family Services Society (KKCFS) and its historic agreement with MCFD to deliver services to all Aboriginal peoples (including Métis and Inuit) in the Kootenay area.

Recently, the Akisqnuk Division of KKCFS acquired all Aboriginal and First Nations cases, files and services from MCFD. The agency is delegated to provide holistic protection services including kinship care, reconnection work, family support and much more. Akisqnuk staff will now handle all services, on and off reserve, in the Windermere/Invermere area from Edgewater to Canal Flats.

This represents another important step forward in providing culturally-directed services for Aboriginal and First Nations children, youth and families in the Creston/Cranbrook area.

For more information, contact Ktunaxa Kinbasket at 1-888-489-4563 (Cranbrook) or 250-342-6379 (Windermere).